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MY BEAUTIFUL LADY

BY

THOMAS WOOLNER

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MY BEAUTIFUL LADY

In some there lies a sorrow so profound
It may not find a voice in words; and never
Throughout their daily tasks, or bountiful
And willing converse born of souls allied,
Reveals itself as sadness. And although
The cheeks may thin; and though may wane their eyes'
Frank lustre; hair may lose its hue, or fall;
And health may slacken low in force; and they
Are older than the warrant of their years;
Yet they to others' seeming gild their lives
With cheerfulness, and every duty tend,
As if their aspects told the truth within.

But they are not as others: not for them
The bounding pulse, the ardour of desire,
The rapture and the wonder in things new;
The hope that palpitating strikes a world
Where gladness floats upon eternal wings;
Nor do they with elastic enterprise
Forecast delight in compassing results;
Nor, having won their ends, fall godlike back
And taste the calm completion of content.
But in a sober, chilled, gray atmosphere,
Work out their lives: and varied though they be,
As creatures in the ocean, or its sand,
Yet each in whom this vital grief has root
Is dull to what makes everything of worth.
And though, maybe, a shallow bodily joy
Oft tingles through them at the breathing spring,
Or first-heard exultation of the lark;
Still that deep weight draws ever steadily
Their thoughts and passions back to secret woe.
And though, should they be gifted, some great acts

May be achieved; and if benignly bent
May be a treasured blessing through their lives;
Yet power and goodness are to them as dreams,
And they heed vaguely, if their waking sight
Be met with slanting storm against the pane,
Or sunshine glittering on the leaves that play
In purest blue of breezy summer morns.

Whence springs this well of sadness so profound,
Unfathomable to plummet cast by man?
Alas; for who can tell! Whence comes the wind
Heaving the ocean into maddened arms
That clutch and dash huge vessels on the rocks,
And scatter them, as if compacted slight
As little eggs boys star against a tree
In wanton mischief? Whence, detestable
To man, who suffers from the monster-jaws,
The power that in the logging crocodiles'
Outrageous bulk puts evil fire of life?
That spouts from mountain-pyramids a flood

Of lava, overwhelming works and men
In burning, fetid ruin?—The power that stings
A city with a pestilence:—or turns
The pretty babe, who in his mother's lap
Babbles her back the lavished kiss and laugh,
Through lusts and vassalage to obdurate sin,
Into a knife-armed, midnight murderer?

Our lives are mysteries; and rarely scanned
As we read stories writ by mortal pen.
We can perchance but catch a straying weft
And trace the hinted texture here or there,
Of that stupendous loom weaving our fates.
Two parents, late in life, are haply blessed
With one bright child, a wonder in his years,
For loveliness and genius versatile:
Some common ill destroys him; parents, both,
Until their death, are left but living tombs
That hold the one dead image of their joy.
A man, the flower of honour, who has found

His well-beloved young daughter fled from home,
Fallen from her maidenhood—a nameless thing
Tainting his blood. A youth who throws the strength
Of his whole being into love for one
Answering him honeyed smiles; who leaves his land
For some far country, seeking wealth he hopes
Will grace her daintily with choice delights,
And on returning sees the honeyed smiles
Are sweetening other lips. A husband who
Has found that household curse—a faithless wife.
A thinker whose long-piercing care perceives
His nation goes the road that ends in shame.
A gracious woman whose reserve denies
The power to utter what consumes her heart.
Such instances, (and some a loss to know,
Which steadfast reticence will shield from those,
Debased or garrulous, whose hearts corrupt,
But learn the gloomy secrets of their kind
To poison-tip their wit, or grope and grin
With pharisaic laughter at disgrace)—

Such instances as these demand no guide
To thrid the dismal issues from their source!
But others are there, lying fast concealed,
Dark, hopeless, and unutterably sad,
Which have not been, and never may be known.

Then we may well call happy one whose grief,
Mixed up with sacred memories of the past,
Can tell to others how the tempest rose,
That struck and left him lonely in the world;
And who, narrating, feels his sorrow soothed,
By that respectful love which sorrow claims.

It much behoves us all, but chiefly those
Whom fate has favoured with an easy trust,
They keep a bridle on their restive speech
And thought: and not in plunging haste prejudge
The first presentment as the rounded truth.
For true it is, that rapid thoughts, and freak
Of skimming word, and glance, more frequently

Than either malice, settled hate, or scorn,
Support confusion, and pervert the right;
Set up the weakling in the strong man's place;
And yoke the great one's strength to idleness;
Pour gold into the squanderer's purse, and suck
The wealth, which is a power, from their control
Who would have turned it unto noble use.
And oftentimes a man will strike his friend,
By random verbiage, acuter pain
Than could a foe, yet scarcely mean him wrong;
For none can strip this complex masquerade
And know who languishes with secret wounds.
They whom the brunt of war has maimed in limb,
Who lean on crutches to sustain their weight,
Are manifest to all; and reverence
For their misfortunes kindly gains them place:
But wounds, sometimes more deep and dangerous,
We may in careless jostle through the crowd,
Gall and oppress, because to us unknown.
Then, howsoever by our needs impelled,

Let us resolve to move in gentleness;
Judge mildly when we doubt; and pause awhile
Before injustice palpably proclaimed
Ere we let fall the judgment stroke: toward
Their ignominious craft, who ever wait
To filch another's right, we will maintain
Majestic peace in silence; knowing well
Their craft takes something richer from themselves.
It is but seemly to respect the great;
But never let us fail toward lowly ones;
Respecting more, in that they lack the force
To claim it of the world. For souls there are
Of poor capacities, whose purpose holds,
Throughout their unregarded lives, a worth,
And earnest law of fixed integrity,
That were an honour even unto those
Whose genius marks the boundaries of our race.

PART THE FIRST

LOVE

Love comes divinely: gladdening mortal life,
As sunrise dawning on the gaze of one
Bewildered in some outland waste, and lost:
Who lonely, faint, and shuddering, through the night
Heard savage creatures nigh; and far-off moan
Of tempests on the wind.

Auroral joy
Flushes the brow of childhood, warms his cheek
To rosier redness at the name of Love:
And early thoughts awake, in darkness strive:
As unfledged nestlings move their sightless heads
As sound, toward a fair world to them unknown.
Young Hope scales azure mountain heights to gaze,
In Love's first golden and delicious dream.

He sees the earth a maze of tempting paths,
For blissful sauntering mid the crowded flowers
And music of the rills. No ambushed wrongs,
Or thwarting storms there baffle and surprise;
But man treads long on odorous, lingering way;
And at the close, with Love clasped hand in hand,
Sets in proud glory: thence to rise anon
With Love beyond the stars and rest in heaven.

Man, nerved by Love, can cheerily sustain
Clash of opposing interests; perplexed web
Of crosses that distracting clog advance:
In thickest storm of contest waxes stronger
At momentary thought of Home, of Her,
His gracious Wife, and bright-faced Joys.

To him
The wrinkled patriarch, who sits and suns
His shrunken form beneath the boughs he climbed
A lissom boy; whence comes that brooding smile,

Whose secret lifts his cheeks, and overflows
His sight with tender dew? What through his frame
Melts languor sweeter than approaching sleep
To one made weary by a hard day's toil?
It is the memory of primal love,
Whose visionary splendour steeped his life
In hues of heaven; and which grown open day,
Revealing perilous falls, his steps confined
Within the pathways to the noblest end.
Now, following this dimmed glory, tired, his soul
Haunts ever the mysterious gates of Death;
And waits in patient reverence till his doom
Unfolding them fulfils immortal Love.

As from some height, on a wild day of cloud,
A wanderer, chilled and worn, perchance beholds
Move toward him through the landscape soaked in gloom
A golden beam of light; creating lakes,
And verdant pasture, farms, and villages;
And touching spires atop to flickering flame;

Disclosing herds of sober feeding kine;
And brightening on its way the woods to song;
As he, that wanderer, brightens when the shaft
Suddenly falls on him. A moment warmed,
He scarcely feels its loveliness before
The light departing leaves his saddened soul
More cold than ere it came.
Thus Love once shone
And blessed my life: so vanished into gloom.

I

MY BEAUTIFUL LADY

I LOVE My Lady; she is very fair;
Her brow is wan, and bound by simple hair:
Her spirit sits aloof, and high,
But glances from her tender eye
In sweetness droopingly.

As a young forest while the wind drives through,
My life is stirred when she breaks on my view;
Her beauty grants my will no choice
But silent awe, till she rejoice
My longing with her voice.

Her warbling voice, though ever low and mild,
Oft makes me feel as strong wine would a child:

And though her hand be airy light
Of touch, it moves me with its might,
As would a sudden fright.

A hawk high poised in air, whose nerved wing-tips
Tremble with might suppressed, before he dips,
In vigilance, scarce more intense
Than I; when her voice holds my sense
Contented in suspense.

Her mention of a thing, august or poor,
Makes it far nobler than it was before:
As where the sun strikes life will gush,
And what is pale receive a flush,
Rich hues, a richer blush.

My Lady's name, when I hear strangers use,
Not meaning her, to me sounds lax misuse:
I love none but My Lady's name;
Maud, Grace, Rose, Marian, all the same,
Are harsh, or blank and tame.

My Lady walks as I have watched a swan
Swim where a glory on the water shone:
There ends of willow branches ride,
Quivering in the flowing tide,
By the deep river's side.

Fresh beauties, howsoe'er she moves, are stirred:
As the sunned bosom of a humming bird
At each pant lifts some fiery hue,
Fierce gold, bewildering green or blue;
The same, yet ever new.

What time she walks beneath the flowering May,
Quite sure am I the scented blossoms say,
"O Lady with the sunlit hair!
Stay and drink our odorous air,
The incense that we bear:

"Thy beauty, Lady, we would ever shade;
For near to thee, our sweetness might not fade."

And could the trees be broken-hearted,
The green sap surely must have smarted,
When My Lady parted.

How beautiful she is! A glorious gem
She shines above the summer diadem
Of flowers! And when her light is seen
Among them, all in reverence lean
To her, their tending Queen.

A man so poor that want assaults his health,
Blessed with relief one morn in boundless wealth,
Breathes no such joy as mine, when she
Stands statelier, expecting me,
Than tall white lilies be:

And the white flutter of her robe to trace,
Where clematis and jasmine interlace,
Expands my gaze triumphantly:
Even such his gaze, who sees on high
His flag, for victory.

We wander forth unconsciously, because
The azure calmness of the evening draws:
When sober hues pervade the ground,
And universal life is drowned
Into hushed depths of sound.

We thread a copse where frequent bramble spray
With loose obtrusiveness from side roots stray,
And force sweet pauses on our walk;
I'll lift one with my foot, and talk
About its leaves and stalk.

Or maybe that some thorn or prickly stem
Will take a prisoner her long garments' hem;
To disentangle it I kneel,
Oft wounding more than I can heal;
It makes her laugh, my zeal.

Or on before a thin-legged robin hops,
And leaping on a twig, he pertly stops,

Speaking a few clear notes, till nigh
We draw, when briskly he will fly
Into some bush close by.

A flock of goldfinches arrest their flight,
And wheeling round a birchen tree alight
Among its glittering leaves; and stay
Till scared at our approach, when they
Strike with vexed trills away.

I recollect My Lady in the wood,
Keeping her breath, while peering as she stood
There, balanced lightly on tiptoe,
To mark a nest built snug below,
Leaves shadowing her brow.

I recollect her puzzled, asking me,
What that strange tapping in the wood might be?
I told of gourmand thrushes, which,
To feast on morsels oozy rich,
Cracked poor snails' curling niche.

And then, as knight led captive, in romance,
Through postern and dark passage, past grim glance
Of arms; where from throned state the dame
He loved, in sumptuous blushes came
To him held dumb for shame:

Even so my spirit passed, and won, through fears
That trembled nigh despair; through foolish tears,
And hope fallen weak in breathless flight,
Where beamed in pure entrancing light
Love's beauty on my sight.

For when we reached a hollow, where the stone
And scattered fragments of the shells lay strown,
By margin of a weedy rill;
"This air," she said, "feels damp and chill,
We'll go home if you will."

"Make not my pathway dull so soon," I cried;
"See how yon clouds of rosy eventide

Roll out their splendour: while the breeze
Shifts gold from leaf to leaf, as these
Thronged saplings move at ease!"

Grateful, in her deep silence, one loud thrush
Startled the air with song; then every bush
Of covert songsters all awoke,
And all, as to their leader's stroke,
Into full chorus broke.

A lonely wind sighed up the pines, and sung
Of woes long past, forgot. My spirit hung
O'er awful gulfs: and loathly dread
So bitter was I wished me dead,
And from a great void said;

"Watch still its glory fade; that sun but burned
To light your loveliness!" The Lady turned
To me, flushed by its lingering rays,
Mute as a star. My frantic praise
Fixed wide her brightened gaze:

—

When, rapt in resolution, I told all
The mighty love I bore her; how would pall
My very breath of life, if she
For ever breathed not hers with me;—
Could I a spirit be,

How, vainly hoping to enrich her grace,
What gems and wonders would I snatch from space;
Would back through the vague distance beat,
Glowing with joy her smile to meet,
And heap them round her feet!

Her waist shook to my arm. She bowed her head
To mine in silence, and my fears had fled:
(Just then we heard a tolling bell.)
Ah no; it is not right to tell;
But I remember well

How dear the pressure of her warm young breast
Against my own, her home; how proud and blessed

I stood and felt her trickling tears,
While proudly murmuring in her ears
The hopes of distant years.

The rest I keep: a holy charm, a source
Of secret strength and comfort on my course.
Her glory left my pathway bright;
And stars on stars throughout the night
Came blooming into light.

II

DAWN

O Lily with the sun of heaven's
  Prime splendour on thy breast!
My scattered passions toward thee run,
  Poising to awful rest.

The darkness of our universe
  Smothered my soul in night;
Thy glory shone; whereat the curse
  Passed molten into light.

Raised over envy; freed from pain;
  Beyond the storms of chance:
Blessed king of my own world I reign,
  Controlling circumstance.

III

NOON

WARBLE, warble, warble, O thou joyful bird!
Warble, lost in leaves that shade my happy head;
Warble loud delights, laud thy warm-breasted mate,
And warbling shout the riot of thy heart,
Thine utmost rapture cannot equal mine.

Flutter, flutter, and flash; crimson-wingèd flower,
Parted from thy stem grown in land of dreams!
Hover and tremble, flitting till thou findest,
Butterfly, thy treasure! Yet thou never canst
Find treasure rich as my contented rest.

Hum on contentedly, thou wandering bee!
Or pausing in chosen flowers drain their sweets;
From honeyed petal thou canst never sip

The sweetest sweet of sweets, as I from Love,—
From Love's warm mouth draw sweetest sweet of sweets.

Round, western wind, in grateful eddies sway,
Whisper deliciously the trembling flowers:
O could I fill thy vacancy as I
Am filled with happiness, thou'dst breathe such sounds
Their blooms should wane and waver sick for love;
Thou'dst utter rarer secrets than are blown
With yonder bean-fields' paradisal scents;—
These bean-field odours, lightly sweet and faint,
That tell of pastures sloping down to streams
Murmuring for ever on through sunny lands;
Where mountains gleam and bank to silvery heights
That scarce the greatest angel's wing can reach;
Where wondrous creatures float beneath the shade
Of growths sublime, unknown to mortal race;
Where hazes opaline lie tranced in dreams,
Where melodies are heard and die at will,
And little spirits make hot love to flowers.

Though broadly flaming, plain of yellow blossom,
A dazzling blaze of splendour in the noon!
And brightening open heaven, ye shining clouds,
With lustrous light that casts the azure dim!
Your radiance all united to the sun's
Were darkness to that glory born in me.

For Love's own voice has owned her love is mine;
And Love's own palm has pressed my palm to hers;
Love's own deep eyes have looked the love she spoke:
And Love's young heart to mine was fondly beating
As from her lips I sucked the sweet of life.

IV

NIGHT

WHAT trite old folly unharmonious sages
In dull books write or prattle day by day,
Of sin original and growing crime!
And commentating the advance of time,
Say wrong has fostered wrong for countless ages,
The strong ones marking down the weak for prey.

It must be wanton trifling thus to bring
Distrust and danger in a peaceful world.
To rail at fruit would seem as wise to me,
Then pluck the blossoms from an apple-tree;
Or blazon madly that a poisoned sting
Within a moth's cocoon is lying curled.

They bruit of wars—that thunder heard in dreams;
Huge insurrections, and dynastic changes
Resolved in blood. I marvel they of thought
By apprehensions are so often wrought
To state as fact what unto all men seems,
Who watch cloud-struggles blown through stormy ranges!

Why fill they not with love the printed page,
Illuminating, as yon moon the night,
Serenely shining on a world of beauty,
Where love moves ever hand in hand with duty;
And life, a long aspiring pilgrimage,
Makes labour but a pastime of delight!

It was delightfulness to him I found
Whistling this afternoon behind his team,
That stepped an easy comfortable pace;
While off the mould-iron curved in rolling grace
Dark earth, wave lapping wave, without a sound;
And all passed by me blissful, like a dream.

And those I noticed hoeing on the hill
Talking familiarly of homely things,
A daughter's marriage day, a son's first child;
How the good Squire at length was reconciled,
Had overlooked the pheasant shot by Will:—
Chirruping on as any cricket sings.

And that complete Arcadian pastoral,
The piping boy who watched his feeding sheep;
And as a little bird o'erflows with joy,
Piped on for hours my happy shepherd boy!
While, coiled below, his faithful animal
Basked in the sunshine, blinking, half asleep.

This silent night-wind bloweth heavenly pure;
Like dimpled warmth of an infantine face.
Lo, glimmering starlike in yon balmy vale
The village lights; each tells a little tale
Of humble comfort, where its inmates, sure
In hope, feel grateful in their lowly place.

And here My Lady's lighted oriel shines
Before me, pretty glowworm, from the gloom.
Ah, stands she smiling there in loose white gown,
Hearing the music of her future drown
The stillness and hushed whispering of the vines,
Whose lattice-clasping leaves o'ershade her room!

Or kneels she worshipful beside her bed
In large-eyed hope and bended lowliness,
To crave that He, the Giver, may impart
Enough of strength to bind her trembling heart
Steadfast and true; and that her will be led
To own His chastening cares pain but to bless?

Or sits she at her mirror, face to face
With her own loveliness? (O blessed land
That owns such twin perfections both together;
If guessed aright!) Ah, me; I wonder whether
She now her braided opulent hair unlace
And drop it billowing from her moonwhite hand!

Then what a fount of wealth to lover's sight!
Her loosened hair, I heard her mother say,
When she is seated, tumbles to the floor
And trails the length of her own foot and more:
And dare I, lapt in bliss, dream my delight
Ere long shall watch its rippling softness play?

Dare I, O vanity! but do I dare
Think she now looks upon the sorry rhyme
I wrote long ere that well-loved setting sun,
What time love conquering dread My Lady won,
While I unblessed, adored in mute despair:—
Even now I gave it her at parting time.

"O let me, Dearest, fall and once impart
My grieving love to ease this stricken heart;
But once, O Love, to fall and rest
This wearied head of mine,
But once to weep in thine
Unutterably tender breast:

And on my drooping lids feel thy young breath;
To feel it playing sweeter were than death.

"Than death were sweet to one grown bent and old,
And worn with persecutions manifold;
Whose stoutness long endured alone
The charge of bitter foes,
Till, furious, he rose,
When smitten, all were overthrown.
Who then of those, his dearest, none could find,
They having fled as leaves before the wind.

"As he would pass, when to his failing sight
Their forms stand in a vision heavenly bright;
And piercing through his drowsed ears
Enters their tuneful cry
Of summons, audibly,
Thither where flow no mourners' tears:
So, dearest Love, my spirit, sore oppressed,
Would weeping in thy bosom sink to rest."

Her window now is darkness, save the sheen
Glazed on it by the moon. Within she lies,
Her supple shape relaxed, in dreamful rest,
And folds contentment babelike to her breast,
Whose beauteous heaving, even and serene,
Beats mortal time to heavenly lullabies.

V

WILD ROSE

To call My Lady where she stood
"A Wild-rose blossom of the wood,"
Makes but a poor similitude.

For who by such a sleight would reach
An aim, consumes the worth in speech,
And sets a crimson rose to bleach.

My Love, whose store of household sense
Gives duty golden recompense,
And arms her goodness with defence:

The sweet reliance of whose gaze
Originates in gracious ways,
And wins that trust the trust repays:

Whose stately figure's varying grace
Is never seen unless her face
Turn beaming toward another place;

For such a halo round it glows
Surprised attention only knows
A lively wonder in repose.

Can flowers that breathe one little day
In odorous sweetness life away,
And wavering to the earth decay,

Have any claim to rank with her,
Warmed in whose soul impulses stir
Then bloom to goodness; and aver

Her worth through spheral joys shall move
When suns and systems cease above,
And nothing lives but perfect Love?

VI

MY LADY'S GLORY

STRONG in the regal strength of love,
Her sway is held on earth
Enthroned by native worth:
Whose soul looks downward from above
Exalted stars; whose power
Brightens the brightest flower.

Her beauty walks in happier grace
Than lightly-moving fawns
O'er old elm-shadowed lawns.
A tenderness shows through her face,
And like the morning's glow,
Hints a full day below.

When looking wide around the skies
On the sun's dazzling track,
And shineth softly back
Its glory to her open eyes,
She fills our hearts and sight
With wonder and delight.

And when tired thought my sense benumbs,
Or when past shadows roll
Their memories on my soul,
Oft breaking through the darkness comes
A solace and surprise,
Her wonder-lighted eyes.

How grand and beautiful the love
She silently conceals,
Nor save in act reveals!
She broods o'er kindness; as a dove
Sits musing in the nest
Of the life beneath her breast.

The ready freshness that was known
In man's authentic prime,
The earliest breath of time,
Throughout her household ways is shown;
Mild greatness subtly wrought
With quaint and childlike thought.

She sits to music: fingers fall,
Air shakes; her lifted voice
Makes flattered hope rejoice,
Till some tones shiver through Time's pall,
Whose wavering rents display
Dim splendour, far away;

Where her perfection, glory-crowned,
Shall rest in love for ever;
When mortal systems sever,
The whole orbed universe be drowned,
Leaving the empty skies
The blank of death-closed eyes.

Deep in this truth I root my trust;
And know the dear One's praise,
Her mutely gracious ways,
When all her loveliness is dust
And mosses rase her name,
Will bless our world the same.

Since first in trembling vagueness born,
Her joyous goodness spread
Like music over head,
Is now a sacred plain of corn
Blooming in tender June,
Lit by a noble moon.

A gap of sunlight in the storm;
A blossom ere the spring;
Immortal whispering;
A spirit manifest through form
Which we can touch and kiss,—
To life such beauty is.

Ah; who can doubt, though he may doubt
Our solid earth will run
A future round the sun,
That gentle impulse given out
Can ever fail or die,
But throbs eternally!

VII

HER SHADOW

At matin time where creepers interlace
We sauntered slowly, for we loved the place,
And talked of passing things; I pleased to trace
Through leafy mimicry the true leaves made
The stateliness and beauty of her shade.

A wavering of strange purples dimly seen,
It gloomed the daisy's light, the kingcup's sheen,
And drank up sunshine from the vital green:
That silent shadow moving on the grass
Struck me with terror it should ever pass:

Precipitated thought on coming years,
Where, in the awful shadow of my fears,
Her shrouded form I saw through blurring tears,

My Darling's shrouded form in beauty's bloom
With funeral pomp move slowly to her tomb.

"What idle dreaming," I abruptly cried:
My Lady turned, half startled, at my side,
And looked enquiry: I through shame or pride,
Bantered the words as mockery of sense,
Mere aimless freak of fostered indolence.

She did not urge me; gentle, wise, and kind!
But clasped my hand and talked: her beaming mind
Arrayed in brightness all it touched. Behind,
Her shadow fell forgot, as she and I
Went homeward musing, smiling at the sky.

Thro' pastures and thro' fields where corn grew strong;
By cottage nests that could not harbour wrong;
Across the bridge where laughed the stream; along
The road to where her gabled mansion stood,
Old, tall, and spacious, in a massy wood.

We loitered toward the porch; but paused meanwhile
Where Psyche holds a dial to beguile
The hours of sunshine by her golden smile;
And holds it like a goblet brimmed with wine,
Nigh clad in trails of tangled eglantine.

In the deep peacefulness which shone around
My soul was soothed: no darksome vision frowned
Before my sight while cast upon the ground
Where Psyche's and My Lady's shadows lay,
Twin graces on the flower-edged gravel way.

I then but yearned for Titian's glorious power,
That I by toiling one devoted hour,
Might check the march of Time, and leave a dower
Of rich delight, that beauty I could see,
For broadening generations yet to be.

VIII

HER GARDEN

THE wind that's good for neither man nor beast
Weeks long incessant from the blighting East
Drove gloom and havoc through the land and ceased.
When swaying mildly over wide Atlantic seas,
Bland and dewy soft streamed the Western breeze.

In walking forth, I felt with vague alarm,
Heavier than wont her pressure on my arm,
As through morn's fragrant air we sought what harm
That Eastern wind's despite had done the garden growth;
Where much lay dead or languished low for drouth.

Her own parterre was bounded by a red
Old buttressed wall of brick, moss-broidered;
Where grew mid pink and azure plots a bed

Of shining lilies intermixed in wondrous light;
She called them "Radiant spirits robed in white."

Here the mad gale had rioted and thrown
Far drifts of snowy petals, fiercely blown
The stalks in twisted heaps: one flower alone
Yet hung and lit the waste, the latest blossom born
Among its fallen kinsmen left forlorn.

"Thy pallid droop," cried I, "but more than all,
Thy lonely sweetness takes my soul in thrall,
O Seraph Lily Blanch! so stately tall:
By violets adored, regarded by the rose,
Well loved by every gentle flower that blows!"

My Lady dovelike to the lily went,
Took in curved palms a cup, and forward leant,
Deep draining to the gold its dreamy scent.
I see her now, pale beauty, as she bending stands,
The wind-worn blossom resting in her hands!)

Then slowly rising, she in gazing trance
Affrayed, long pored on vacancy. A glance
Of chilly splendour tinged her countenance
And told the saddened truth, that stress of blighting
weather,
Had made her lilies and My Lady droop together.

IX

TOLLING BELL

"WEAK, but her spirits good," the letter said:
A bell was tolling, while these words I read,
A dull sepulchral summons for the dead.
Fear grew in every pace I strode
Hurrying on that endless road.

When I had reached the house a terror came
That wrought in me a hidden sense of blame,
And entering I scarce dared to speak her name,
Who lay, sweet singer, warbling low
Rhymes I made her long ago.

I watched in awkward wonder for a time
As there she listless lay and sang my rhyme,
Wrapped up in fabrics of an Indian clime,
And looked a Bird of Paradise
Languid from the traversed skies.

A dawn-bright snowy peak her smile. . . . Strange I
Should dawdle near her grace admiringly,
When love alarmed and challenged sympathy,
Announced in chills of creeping fear
Danger surely threatening near.

I shrunk from searching the abyss I felt
Yawned by; whose verge voluptuous blossoms belt
With dazzling hues:—she speaks! I fall and melt,
One sacred moment drawn to rest,
Deeply weeping in her breast:

Within the throbbing treasure wept! But brief
Those loosening tears of blessed deep relief,
That won triumphant ransom from my grief,

While loving words and comfort she
Breathed in angel tones to me.

Our visions met, when pityingly she flung
Her passionate arms about me, kissing clung,
Close kisses, stifling kisses; till each wrung,
With welded mouths, the other's bliss
Out in one long sighing kiss.

Love-flower that burst in kisses and sweet tears,
Scattering its roseate dreamflakes, disappears
Into cold truth: for, loud with brazen jeers,
That bell's toll, clanging in my brain,
Beat me, loath, to earth again:

Where, looking on my Love's endangered state,
Wrought by keen anguish mad, I struck at fate,
Prostrating mockingly in sport or hate
The aspirations, darkling, we
Cherish and resolve to be.

She spoke, but sharply checked; then as her zone
A lady's hands would clasp, My Lady's own
Pressed at her yielding side; her solemn tone
And forward eager face implored
I would bend where she adored.

Despite her pain, with tender woman's phrase
She solaced me, whose part it was to raise
Anew the gladness to her weakened gaze,
And kindly in man's firmness be
To my drooping vine a tree.

But no; sunk, dwindled, dwarfed, and mean, beside
Her couch I sitting saw her vision wide
With awe, and heard her voice move as the tide
Of steady music rich and calm
In some grand cathedral psalm:

Then, as that grand psalmodic sound o'erflows
The dusky, vaulted aisles, and slowly grows
A burst of harmony the hearer knows,

Her voice assailed my rage, and I
Took its purport wonderingly.

" Ah, pause for dread, before you charge in haste
The ways of fate; for how can those be traced
That in the life Omnipotent lie based?
Or earth-grown atom's bounded soul
Grasp the universal whole?

" The more he chafes, the worse his fetter galls
The luckless captive closed in dungeon walls,
And, fighting chains and stones, he fighting falls:
Nor will that wasteful immolation
Touch his lofty victor's station.

" Woe be to him perverse who, weak and blind,
In pride refusing to behold, shall find
The ponderous roll of circumstance will grind
His steps; and if he turn not, must
Bruise and crush him into dust.

"We are the Lord's, not ours, His angels sing;
So you, mine own, bow meekly to your King,
And striving hard and long His grace will bring:
You'll hear Him through the battle cry,
When the strife is raging high."

She fluttering paused: awhile her surging zeal
All utterance overwhelmed to mute appeal:
I felt as men who fallen in battle feel,
When far their chief's sword, like a gem,
Points to glory not for them.

"When naked heaven is azure to your eyes,
And light shines everywhere, you can be wise;
But, when its storms in common course arise,
To you the wind but sobs and grieves
Wailing with the streaming leaves.

"Rust eats the steel, and moths corrupt the cloth,
And peevish doubts destroy the soul that's loth
To strive for duty, merged in shameful sloth,

And lolls a weary wretch forlorn,
While men reap the mellow corn.

" It is not man's to dream in sweet repose;
He toils and murmurs, as he wondering goes,
Poor changeful glitter on the stream that flows
In lapses huge and solemn roar,
Ever on without a shore.

" The plantlet grown in darkness puts forth spray;
Through loaded gloom yearns feebly toward some ray
Of bounty golden from the outer day
That shines eternally sublime
On the dancing motes of time."

The music stopped, and passed into a smile
Of tenderness, which she impressed to guile
Her pain from me: I gazed as one awhile
Escaped, who sees twin rainbows shine
O'er his wrecked ship gulfed in brine.

My lost soul sank adown in soundless seas
To ruined heaps besprent with ancient lees
Of wealth: by soft stupendous ocean-trees;
By anchors forged in early time,
Changed to trails of rusted slime:

To where, what seemed a tomb, in this deep hell
Of night, that bore a name I dread to tell:
And while I read struck some gigantic bell,
Whose thunder laughing through my brain
Mocked me back to flesh again.

Here all was emptier than the empty shade
Of mist before a midnight moon decayed:
Here life was strange as death, and more dismayed
My spirit, now scarce conscious she
Urged entreaty yet to me.

"'Tis life in life to know the King is just,
And will not animate his helpless dust
With fire unquenchable whose ardour must

Achieve majestic deeds that raise
Universal shouts of praise:

"Shouts of acclaim that gather into story,
Chanted by one on some high promontory
Who glowing in the dawn's advancing glory,
Far down upon the listening crowd
Shines through swathes of lingering cloud.

"And fires, by what he sings, to noble feud
With grosser instincts, the charged multitude,
That grow in temper and similitude
To those great souls whose victories
Triumph still in melodies.

"This fire will not be granted to distress,
To fail in cold dead ash and bitterness:
He will not grant true love that yearns to bless
The world, that it may only sigh
Back into itself and die."

The words here faltering sank to undertone:
Her soul was murmuring to itself alone
On some wide desolation, dark, unknown;
Whose limits, stretched from mortal sight,
Touch the happy hills of light.

"I, toiling at the task assigned to me,
Am summoned from my labour suddenly:
The King recalls his handmaiden; and she
Submissively herself anoints,
Going whither He appoints.

"The sheaves are garnered now, her work is done,
The day is waning, and she must be gone,
To bend herself before the Holy One,
And strictly her appointed meed
There accept in very deed."

Dead silence, more than if a thunder-stroke
Had crashed the summer air, my sense awoke
To sudden apprehension: hard the yoke

Of misery was mine to bear;
Wrath-befooled, in my despair

I went, and, leaning from the lattice, mused
On my immeasurable woe; accused
Heaven's King, that, like an earthly one, abused
His power omnipotent, and hurled
Curses broadcast on the world.

Then glancing toward her danger thought, "A cell
Of noxious vapours this dull life; as well
She should escape: so pure! she scarce could dwell
With sinful creatures who alway
Stumbling take the stain of clay.

"But I unworthy! How in conscience I—
How could I hazard guidance in her high
Cold path of duty leading to the sky!
As well hold torch to light a star
Shining, mystic, nebular.

"She yearns to bless the world: just love for all
Best shows in love for one; love cannot fall
Like sunshine over half this wondrous ball,
But her love grandly yearns to bless
All the world. Strange tenderness!"

This shameful mockery of myself alone
Was interrupted by a sobbing moan
That brought me to her couch, where low mine own
Sweet Love lay swooning ashy white,
Eyelids closing from the light.

Ah, coarse, hard, bitter, brutal self! A beast
In passion, nay far worse than such, to feast
On baseless anger against her whose least
Stray word was kind, her daily food
Interest in another's good.

My passion then, like an unruly horse
Checked by a master's hand, fell slack; its force
Unnerved, and stifling me with hot remorse;

Frightened, despairing, "Love," I cried,
Wildly busy at her side;

And kissed and chafed her brow; I chafed her hand;
Audacious grown with fear, released the band
That clasped her tender waist, and keenly scanned
Each feature, till her opening eyes
Met my own in bright surprise:

"Ah you! I had from you passed and the world;
Through endless nothing rudely was I hurled
While you did hang above, your proud lip curled,
Regarding me with piercing hate
Crying I deserved my fate."

We met each other, as when waters meet
In long continued shock, and muttering, sweet
Confusion mixed in unity complete
That changing time may not dissever;
One in love and one for ever.

Purged by remorse, love knit my strength; and now
Came gracious power to still upon her brow
Those troubled waves of some dark underflow;
And her great soul, subduing pain
Spoke in golden smiles again.

We sat and read how Prospero his strife
With magic forces crowned his lofty life
In making two fair beings man and wife:
And of Count Gismond's happy lot;
Then the Lady of Shalott.

We ceased; for eve had come by dusky stealth.
I saw, while lifting her, like crimson health
Burn in her cheeks, holding the weighted wealth
Of all the worlds in heaven to me;
Held her long, long, lingeringly:

And laying down more than my life, her weight;
Scarce kissed her pallid hands, then moved with great
Reluctance, bodeful, from her placid state;

But, ere my slow feet reached the door,
Turned and caught one last look more,

And awe-struck stood to see portentous loom
From her large eyes full gazing through the gloom
Love darkly wedded to eternal doom,
As she were gazing from the dead:
Falling at her feet I said,

"Bless me, dear Love, bless me before I go;
With love divine a beam of comfort throw,
For guidance and support, that I through woe
Be raised and purified in grace
Worthy to behold your face."

She bowed her head in stately tenderness
Low whispering as her hands my brow did press,
"I pray that He will your lone spirit bless,
And if to leave you be my fate,
Pray you for me while I wait."

A useless pang in her no more to wake,
I forced myself away, nor dared to take
Another look for her belovèd sake;
My face had told of the distressed
Swollen heart labouring in my breast.

When in the outer air, I felt as one
Fresh startled from a dream, wherein the sun
Had dying left the earth a dingy, dun
Annihilation. The nightjar
Only thrilled the air afar:

No other sound was there: a muffled breeze
Crept in the shrubs, and shuddered up the trees,
Then sought the ghost-white vapour of the leas,
Where one long sheet of dismal cloud
Swathed the distance in a shroud.

A solitary eye of cold stern light
Stared threateningly beyond the Western height,
Wrapped in the closing shadows of the night;

And all the peaceful earth had slept
But that eye stern vigil kept.

I wandered wearily I knew not where;
Up windy downs far-stretching, bleak and bare;
Through swamps that soddened under stagnant air;
In blackest woods and brambled mesh,
Thorny bushes tore my flesh:

Amid the ripening corn and heard it sigh,
Hollow and sad, as night crawled sluggishly:
Hollow and sadly sighed the corn while I
Moved darkly in the midst, a blight
Darkening more the hateful night.

My soul its hoarded secrets emptied on
The vaulted gloom of night: old fancies shone,
And consecrated ancient hopes long gone;
Old hopes that long had ceased to burn,
Gone, and never to return.

No starlight pierced the dense vault over head,
And all I loved was passing or had fled:
So on I wandered where the pathway led;
And wandered till my own abode
Spectral pale rose from the road.

What time I gained my home I saw the morn
Made dimly on the sullen East. Wayworn
I went into the echoing house forlorn,
Heartsick and weary sought my room,
Better had it been the tomb.

I lay, and ever as my lids would close
In dull forgetfulness to slumberous dose,
Lone sounds of phantom tolling scared repose;
Till wearied nature, sore oppressed,
Slowly sank and dropped to rest.

X

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

" Gone the sickness, fled the pain,
Health comes bounding back again,
And all my pulses tingle for delight.
Together what a pleasant thing
To ramble while the blackbirds sing,
And pasture lands are sparkling dewy bright!

" Soon will come the clear spring weather,
Hand in hand we 'll roam together,
And hand in hand will talk of springs to come;
As on that happy day you played
The necromancer with my shade,
In senseless shadow gazing darkly dumb.

" Cast away that cloudy care,
Or, I vow, in my parterre
You shall not enter when the lilies blow,
And I go there to stand and sing
Songs to the heaven-white wondrous ring;
Sir Would-be Wizard of the crumpled brow!"

XI

GIVEN OVER

THE men of learning say she must
Soon pass and be as if she had not been.
To gratify the barren lust
Of Death, the roses in her cheeks are seen
To blush so brightly, blooming deeper damascene.

All hope and doubt, all fears are vain:
The dreams I nursed of honouring her are past,
And will not comfort me again.
I see a lurid sunlight throw its last
Wild gleam athwart the land whose shadows lengthen
fast.

It does not seem so dreadful now
The horror stands out naked, stark, and still:
I am quite calm, and wonder how
My terror played such mad pranks with my will.
The North winds fiercely blow, I do not feel them chill.

All things must die: somewhere I read
What wise and solemn men pronounce of joy;
No sooner born, they say, than dead:
The strife of being, but a whirling toy
Humming a weary moan spun by capricious boy.

Has my soul reached a starry height
Majestically calm? No monster, drear
And shapeless, glares me faint at night;
I am not in the sunshine checked for fear
That monstrous shapeless thing is somewhere crouching near?

No; woe is me! far otherwise:
The naked horror numbs me to the bone;
In stupor calm its cold blank eyes
Set hard at mine. I do not fall or groan,
Our island Gorgon's face has changed me into stone.

XII

STORM

Now thickening round the shrunken baseless sky,
Sullen vapours crawl
Climbing to masses, tumbled heavily
Grim in giant sprawl,
That smother up domed heaven's scud-fleckered height,
And form like mortal armies ranged for fight.

This lighted gloom spreads ghastly on the land;
Sheep do crowd; and herds
Collecting, bellow pitifully bland.
Quiet are the birds
In ghostly trees that shiver not a sound:
And leaves decayed drop straight unto the ground.

Drearily solemn runs a monotone,
Heard through breathless hush,
Swollen torrents hissing far in lavish moan,
Foamed with headlong rush,
Sob on protesting, toward annihilation,
Their solitary dismal lamentation.

This gloom has sucked all interest from the scene,
Now changed wrathful gray:
Familiar things, that staring plain had been,
Fade in mists away:
At ambush, watching from its stormy lair,
Some danger hovering loads the stagnant air.

It serves to little purpose I may know
That electric law
Whereby the jagged glare and thunder-blow
Latent impulse draw;
No less my danger. Ha! that lightning flash
Proclaims in fire the coming thunder-crash.

But what care I though deluges do pour
Beating earth to mire,
Though heaven shattering with the thunder's roar
Scorcheth now in fire,
Though every planet molten from its place
Should trickle lost through everlasting space;

For this blank prospect, void of all but dread,
Void as any tomb,
My soul has left; and by a lonely bed,
In a girl's sick room,
Hangs there expectant of her parting breath,
The silent voice of doom, the stroke of death.

PART THE SECOND

UNION
SOCIETY

I

MY LADY IN DEATH

ALL is but coloured show. I look
Up through the green hues shed
By leaves above my head,
And feel its inmost worth forsook
My being, when she died.
This heart, now hot and dried,
Halts, as the parched course where a brook
Mid flowers was wont to flow,
Because her life is now
No more than stories in a printed book.

Grass thickens proudly o'er that breast,
Clay-cold and sadly still,
My happy face felt thrill.
How much her dear, dear mouth expressed!
And now are closed and set
Lips which my own have met!
Her eyelids by the damp earth pressed!
Damp earth weighs on her eyes;
Damp earth shuts out the skies.
My Lady rests her heavy, heavy rest.

To see her high perfection sweep
The favoured earth, as she
With welcoming palms met me!
How can I but recall and weep?
Her hands' light charm was such,
Care vanished at their touch.
Her feet spared little things that creep;
"For stars are not," she 'd say,
"More wonderful than they."
And now she sleeps her heavy, heavy sleep.

Immortal hope shone on that brow,
Above whose waning forms
Go softly real worms.
It surely was a cruel blow
Which cut my Darling's life
Sharply, as with a knife;
I hate my own that lets me grow
As grows a bitter root
From which rank poisons shoot,
Upon the grave where she is lying low.

Almighty King! Could it be just,
To let her young life play
Its easy, natural way;
Then, with an unexpected thrust,
Strike out the life you lent,
Even as her feelings blent
With those around whose love would trust
Her willing power to bless,
For all their happiness?
Alone she moulders into common dust.

Birds twittering peck the variant weeds
That wave above this bed
Where my dear Love lies dead:
Their fluttering bursts the globèd seeds,
And beat the downy pride
Of dandelions, wide:
On speargrass, bowed with watery beads,
The wet uniting, drips
In sparkles off the tips:
In mallow bloom the wild bee drops and feeds.

No more she hears, where vines adorn
Her window, on the boughs
Birds chirrup an arouse:
Flies, buzzing, strengthening with the morn,
She will not hear again
At random strike the pane:
No more on grassplat newly shorn
With her gown's glancing hem
Bend down the daisy's stem,
In walking forth to view what flowers are born.

Nor ponder more those dark green rings
Stained quaintly on the lea,
To picture elfin glee;
While through the grass a faint air sings,
And swarms of insects revel
Along the sultry level:
No more will watch their brilliant wings,
Now lightly dip, now soar
Then sink, and rise once more.
My Lady's death makes dear these trivial things.

One noon, within an oak's broad shade,
Lost in delightful talk,
We rested from our walk.
Beyond the shadow cows were laid,
Chewing with drowsy eye
Their cud complacently:
Elegant deer walked o'er the glade,
Or stood with wide bright eyes
Gazing a short surprise;
And up the fern slope nimble conies played.

Rooks cawed and laboured through the heat;
Each wing-flap seemed to make
Their weary bodies ache;
The swallows, though so wildly fleet,
Made breathless pauses there
At something in the air.
All disappeared: our pulses beat
Distincter throbs, and each
Turned and kissed without speech,
She trembling from her mouth down to her feet.

I felt her youthful bosom heave,
And listened to the din
Of joyous life within.
My forehead felt her lightly breathe,
As with her breath it rose;
And in our blest repose
Her two arms clasped my neck: while eve
In shadowy silence came
And quenched the Western flame,
That lingered round her as if loath to leave.

Then told I in a whispered tone
Of that approaching time,
When merry peal and chime
Of marriage ringing should make known,
In crashes through the air
Exultingly we were
By solemn rite each other's own:
And she, confiding, meek,
Against mine pressed her cheek,
And gave response in happy tears alone.

No heed of time took we, because
Those clanging bells had quite
Absorbed us in delight.
A happiness so perfect awes
The failing pulse and breath,
Like the mute doom of death:
As then, an instantaneous pause
Flashed on my vacant eye
A swift Eternity:
When starting, as if clutched by demon-claws,

Awakened from a dizzy swoon;
I felt appalling fears
With ringings in my ears,
And wondered why the glaring moon
Swung round the dome of night
With such tremendous might.
Next came, like the sweet air of June,
A treacherous calm suspense
That bred a loathly sense,
Some nameless ill would overwhelm me soon.

She passed like summer flowers away.
Her aspect and her voice
Will never more rejoice,
For both lie hushed in cold decay.
Broken the golden bowl
Which held her vital soul:
It was an idle boast to say
"Our souls are as the same,"
And stings me now to shame:
Her spirit went, and mine did not obey.

The black truth, with a fiery dart,
Went hurtling through my thought,
When I beheld her brought
Whence she with life did not depart.
Her beauty by degrees
Sank, sharpened with disease:
The heavy sinking at her heart
Sucked hollows in her cheek,
And made her eyelids weak,
Though oft they opened wide with sudden start.

The Deathly Power in silence drew
My Lady's life away.
I watched, dumb for dismay,
The shock of thrills that quivered through
Her wasted frame, and shook
The meaning in her look,
As near, more near, the moment grew.
O horrible suspense!
O giddy impotence!
I saw her features lax, and change their hue.

Her gaze, grown large with fate, was cast
Where my mute agonies
Made sadder her sad eyes:
Her breath caught with short plucks and fast,
Then one hot choking strain;
She never breathed again.
I had the look which was her last:
Even after breath was gone,
Her love one moment shone,
Then slowly closed, and hope for ever passed.

A dreadful tremour ran through space
When first the mournful toll
Rang for My Lady's soul.
Vitality was hell; her grace
Only the flattering gleam
And mockery of a dream:
Oblivion struck me like a mace,
And as a tree that's hewn
I dropped, in a dead swoon,
And lay a long time cold upon my face.

Earth had one quarter turned before
My miserable fate
Pressed down with its whole weight.
My sense came back; and shivering o'er
I felt a pain to bear
The sun's keen cruel glare,
Which shone not warm as heretofore;
And never more its rays
Will satisfy my gaze:
No more; no more; oh, never any more.

II

DAY DREAM

WHAT art thou whispering lowly to thy babe,
O wan girl-mother, with Madonna lids
Downcast? Why pressest thou so close his pale
Geranium cheek to thy yet whiter breast?
Ah, doubtless sweet; to feel him draw the stream
That fills with strength his lily limbs! And laughs
Thine own heart with his deeply dimpled laughter,
Answering straight thy dainty finger's touch?
And understandeth he that murmurous moan,
Wherewith thou hushest, patting him to rest?

What visions charm thy gaze, now resting wide

In settled, sweet content? Beholdest thou
Thy babe, now sprung a man, walk sunhazed slopes
With one lovelier than visions; lovely as
The truth, O Love, when thou dost smile on me?
Or seest thou him still greater grown in might,
And stout of action, forcing on to reach
That changeful coloured flag, whose waving crests
The glittering heights of fame, for which men pant;
Unmindful there what tempests rage and sweep?
Alas; what dream has made that watery veil
Hide thine eye's light from mine; even as a mist
Passing between me and a harvest moon!
And whence this shadowy wall that baulks my gaze?
Why fadest thou, thyself, in mist, O Love?
Whither hath fled thy babe—and where art thou?—
Where am I?—Is it life—a dream—or death?

Ah me; alas, this crushing wretchedness!
And I a vainer fool than one who yearns
Clutching at rainbows spanned across the sky!

Ah, hope diseased! My spirit lured astray
By siren hopes drifts hard by some dark fate:
And hope alternating despair has mixed
My life so long with charnelled death, that I
Can scarce resolve the present from my past,
Nor what might once have been from what is now.

Ah, Dearest! shall I never see thy face
Again: not ever; never any more?
I know that fancy was but naught, and one
Born of past hope: I know thy earthly form
Is mouldering in its tomb: but yet, O Love,
Thy spirit must dwell somewhere in this waste
Of worlds, that fill the overwhelming heavens
With light and motion; that could never die!
And wilt thou not vouchsafe one beaming look
To ease a lonely heart that beats in pain
For loss of thee, and only thee, O Love?
Or hast thou found in that pure life thou livest
My soul was an unworthy choice for thine,

And therefore takest no count of its despair?
And yet, yea verily, thy love was true;
I would not wrong thee with another thought:
I would not enter at the gates of heaven
By thinking else than that thy love was true.
But I obtain no response to my cries,
Making within my soul all void, and cold,
And comfortless.
Ay, empty, as this grate,
Of life, wherefrom the fire has well nigh fled,
And leaves but a chasmed ugliness and ruin:
And weak as faltering of these taper flames
Half sunken in their sockets, by whose gleam
I see, though faintly, where my books stand ranged
Most mute; though sometime eloquent to me;
And where my pictures hang with other forms
Instinct from what I know: and friends portrayed
Like ghosts loom on me from another world.
Then what remains, but, like a child worn out
With weeping, that I sink me down to rest,
And sleep, not dream—and if I could would die?

III

MY LADY'S VOICE FROM HEAVEN

I HAD been sitting by her tomb
In torpor one dark night;
When fitful tremours shook the doom
Of cold, lethargic, settled gloom,
That weighed upon my sight:

And while I sat, and sickly heaves
Disturbed my spirit's sloth,
A wind came, blown o'er distant sheaves,
That hissing, tore and lashed the leaves
And lashed the undergrowth:

It roared and howled, it raged about
With some determined aim;
And storming up the night, brought out
The moon, that like a happy shout,
Called forth My Lady's name

In sudden splendour on the stone.
Then, for an instant, I
Snatched and heaped up my past, bestrown
With hopes and kisses, struggling moan,
And pangs: as suddenly,

Oppressed with overwhelming weight,
Down fell the edifice;
When touched, as by the hand of Fate,
My gloom was gone. I felt my state
So light, I sobbed for bliss.

The loud winds, spent in seeking rest,
Dropped dead. My fevered brow

Drank coolness from the grass it pressed;
And in my desolated breast
A change began to grow,

While those blessed tears did slowly drain
The load of grief which had
A sluggish curse within me lain,
Save when remembrance wrought my brain
For vivid moments mad.

My tears, as treasures of a wreck
That in the ocean slept
Recovered, flowed without a check;
And Earth was my good mother's neck
To which I clung and wept.

I rose at length, and felt a dense,
Benumbed, dead weight. And now
The night air hung in deep suspense;
A singing hush that pressed my sense
And stunned me like a blow:

Through my lids clenched, the living air,
In gold and purple rings
Danced musically round me there,
The light it held throbbed with the glare
And beat of rapid wings.

Mine eyes I dared not try to raise;
My Lady's beamed on me
In fixed serenity of gaze,
And were what old sunshiny days
In childhood used to be.

A gasping lapse; and I was whirled
Round the faint void of space;
In dizzy circles hugely hurled,
I saw the constellated world
With every orb embrace

To one stupendous vortex-light,
Spinning a fiery rain,

Then fail, struck out by sudden night:
When swung adown in headlong might,
Earth's touch shook through my brain.

The dumb sound in mine ears was burst
By Her portentous voice;
As sweet as death to one accurst,
As unto one near blind for thirst
A running water's noise.

Her voice in some translucent star,
Remote, beyond my sight,
Was singing marvellously far;
And yet so strangely near to jar
As jars too strong a light.

She sang a song. She warbled low,
She did not sing in words;
I felt it in my spirit glow,
And knew it, as with joy I know
The morning shouts of birds.

But hard the task I undertake,
With mortal tongue to reach
The utterance of My Love, and make
Her high immortal meaning break
To clearness through my speech!

I can no more, with glimmering trope,
That into darkness runs,
Reveal its depth, than they could hope,
Who on in lifelong blindness grope,
To sing of rising suns.

"Or e'er that life my King had lent
Was lifted into rest,
His message through my lips He sent,
And on thy path His glory went
To guide thee to the blessed.

"But thou didst turn thy face, and scorn
His grace divine as nought;

And set thy gaze to earth forlorn,
And rage at fate, till gaunt and worn,
Death mouldered in thy thought.

" Thou, blindly gross, didst toy with clay,
And in the ghastly gleam
Of charnel gloom didst kiss decay;
And many full moons waned away,
And left thee in thy dream.

" For with thy Lily's worldly dress
Thou didst thine eyesight fill;
And scorn to know its loveliness
Were but an empty boast unless
Made living by His will.

" Thou mourn'd'st not most the vanished soul
Which was my Lord's through thine;
But more the broken pleasure-bowl,
Whose golden richness shed, when whole,
Deep splendour in thy wine.

" And therefore living wert thou made
To taste the cup of death;
And therefore did the glory fade,
From guidance, into deadly shade
That iced thy hackered breath.

" Permitted, now I come to thee:
I warn thee of thy sin;
I urge thee cleanse thine eyesight free,
And purified again thou 'lt see
The way His love to win.

" His love incomprehensible
Did never turn away
From penitent whom harm befell;
But springeth like a desert well
For thirsting poor estray.

" Let him who scorneth mercy shown,
Unhappy one, beware!

For whoso lives in pride alone,
His pride shall harden to a stone
Too great for him to bear.

"And whoso, having warnèd been,
Refuseth still to turn,
Behind his shadow, shrunken mean,
A poring spectre shall be seen
With livid stare and girn.

"Thou troubled one, who unto me
Art next my Lord's own grace,
O turn to Him, and He will be
A refuge from thy misery,
A smile upon thy face!

"A righteous strength will nerve thine arm,
And courage fill thy breast:
And having bravely warred on harm,
The cries of victory shall charm
Thy dying eyes to rest.

"And succoured ones shall praise his name
Who, toiling for them, died.
And, nobly sung, his honest fame
Shall beat in hearts unborn, and claim
Their love and grateful pride.

"And Love will lead her sacrifice
To where a shining row
Stand beckoning to the heights of bliss;
And she will clasp his hands and kiss
Welcome upon his brow."

I knew not when the singing ceased
To trance my brightened soul,
Now from that long eclipse released.
But looking hopeful toward the East,
I saw flush pole to pole

The dawn, that had begun to show,
And through dank vapour burned,
As in a sick face lying low

The rich incarnadine would glow,
When healthy life returned.

Small drowsy chirpings met the light,
And dim in lowlands far
Lone marsh-birds winged their misty flight;
What time Her aspect on my sight
Beamed from the morning star.

It waned into the warbling day;
That, rising fierce and strong,
Now looked the Western gloom away,
And kindled such a roundelay,
The world awoke with song.

And fresh delicious breezes came
With scents of paradise
So tingling through my knitted frame,
That never since I lisped a name
Knew I such joy arise.

Pure was the azure over head;
Bright was the earth around;
While I on resolutions fed,
And moved, as one called from the dead,
In silence on the ground.

Toward my home I walked, elate
With hope and settled plan:
And reverent to the will of Fate,
In every step I trod my weight,
A sober-minded man.

PART THE THIRD

I

YEARS AFTER

Our world has spun ten circles round the light
Since here she vanished. In my helpless gaze,
To mark the spot, was fixed this carven stone,
Raw, garish, stolidly obtrusive then,
Now harmonizing kindly with the rest.
A spray of centipedal ivy creeps
From death to birth, and clings fast to her name;
With kisslike touch its tender leaflets feel
The letters' edge. I scarce can think it chance.

Now scene by scene that strange old long-ago,
Crowding my opened memory, presents

Tumultuously some dreadful feverish state,
Wherein I knew not falsehood from the truth;
Where hope ascending struck the star of Love,
Then fell down headlong grovelling in despair;
But rose at length and walked the beaten way.
So dim and far remote; so worn and changed,
I cannot feel myself as him who sought
And won her love. And is it true indeed,
That I absorbed in tenderest intercourse
Of trustful glance, and trustful clasping hands,
With her went wandering by the river side;
While over head melodious branches sang,
Scattering the gold of sunset-dazzled flowers
Breathing their perfumed sweetness from our path,
That flickering reached, where set in purple woods,
The rugged church tower burned a wall of fire!

Did I, when silence awed the winter woods,
And giant shadows trenched the frosty ground
From bole and limb whose vault held in the night,

Love to behold the full-grown magic moon
Bring splendours glittering on the silver rime?

Yes; mid the notes and emerald flush of spring,
With swollen brooks exulting through the fields,
And rainy winds that in an ocean-roar
Bore down the forest tops the livelong day,
Through straggling gleams, through random wafts of shade,
Rejoicingly I trode the glistening paths.

Yes, I it was, in dreamy golden haze,
Beheld poor men hard toiling all the hours,
And thought them happier than the birds that sung,
That sung and trilled in gurgles of delight.

Dallying I loitered in the golden time
Long after the loved nightingale had ceased
To pour his passionate impulse over plains
Of shivering corn, now ripened into wealth;

When sunset-coloured fruit in orchard crofts
Hung slowly mellowing under azure noons;
And, hushed in darkened leaves, the dreaming air
Swelled gently to a whispering sound, and died.
With joy I wandered on from knoll to knoll,
And lost in marvel, drank the lisping winds,
The fairy winds that lisped me all was good.
Nor marked I when the clogged horizon flew
In dusky vapour crowding up the skies;
But woke anon when deathlike pallor thrown
From wrathful drifts laid the whole land in gloom;
When war, enormous war, broke through the heavens,
In sheets and streaking fire and thunderous clap,
With shock on shock, that crushed the ripened corn,
And swept the piled up midsummer to ruin,
That wrenched great timbers of a thousand years,
Shaking the strong foundations of the land.
And when at last the terrible tempest fell,
Wide heaven was emptied of the sun and stars,
Or void of more than all their light to me.

Life fretted me to hollow weariness
When my sweet Dove of Paradise went off,
Ascending, glory-guarded, into heaven.
Then feeding on the past, and fondling death,
I grew in livid horror: soon had grown,
By foul self cankered, to a charnel ghoule,
Had not Almighty God, gracious in love,
Permitted her own presence once again,
Mysterious, as a vision, yet once more
Appear, a shining warning, to reveal
Athwart my path unfathomable gulfs,
And kindle hope wherewith I still might gain
The hills that shine for ever to the blessed.

Much striving has been mine since these events
Ruled the pulsations of my daily life:
And now they are a vulgar chronicle,
And gossiped over by the rudest tongues.
A haunting song of old felicities
Lured me, scarce consciously, down here to muse

Upon my shattered dreams; safe from the roar
Of interests in our vast metropolis,
The beating heart of England and the world.
Not seen by me, since on that wondrous night
Her consolation came into my soul;
Yet here again I stand beside her tomb—
And here I muse, more wise and not so sad.

Hers was a gracious and a gentle house!
Rich in obliging nice observances
And famed ancestral hospitality.
A cool repose lay grateful through the place;
And pleasant duties (promptly, truly, done,
And every service touched by hidden springs
Oiled with intelligence,) moved smoothly round.

The steward to that stately country home
Looked native there as lichen to the oak.
He first held station, chief in care and trust,
That day which gave his baby mistress birth;

And her he loved as father loves his own,
Bearing her too that reverence which we feel
Toward those who, born to loftier state than ours,
Sit their high fortune with becoming grace.
His love she ever sumptuously returned
In bounteous thankfulness for service done:
How brightly twinkled then his shrewd gray eyes,
And shone the roundness where his honest cheeks
Played to the rippling gladness of his mouth!
In childish rambles, it was mostly he
She chose her partner, spite of blandishment;
And to her winsome ways he would forego
His pompous surveillance of wine and plate,
To guard her, lilting, where the summer lay
On honeyed murmuring limes, and under elms,
August with knotted centuries of strength
And rooks sonorous in their shadowy heights.
By thymy slope, foot-deep in sward they roved,
Both lightly garrulous, and she, sweet child,
Fusing her whole attention into joy,

Until they stood before the lake, that gleamed
With water-lilies, sun, and moving cloud.
Then straight each flanking sedge, and reeds remote,
Gave clattering ducks and wild outlandish fowl,
That tore in stormy scampering and splash
To snap with clamour at the crumbled bread,
He had provided slyly, bent on fun:
The swans meanwhile, majestic, puffed, and slow,
Came proudly into action; but alas,
To small result; for by mischance the spoil
Through dexterous skirmish fell to meaner bills.
"Our bread is all cast on the waters now,
"And well I'd like to know how many days
"It must bide there before 'tis found again!"—
Some fool's dull joke repeated: good man, he,
Unversed in deep text comment, never dreamed
What time its Abyssinian mountain roots
Swollen by fresh torrents mix in Nubian lands,
And thunder down from rocky ledge to ledge;
How Sacred Nilus flooding bank and plain

Transformed old Egypt to a shining sea:
When slaves in swarthy crowds, despised as dirt,
Upon the waters paddled scattering corn,
While swam to their sad eyes a raking glance
Of temple-sphinxes, palms, and pyramids,
Faint sacrificial fires with dismal cries;
And small hard masters, armed with blooded thongs,
Jocose and fierce, scourged out their utmost toil.
Long ages ere man heard this promised hope,
THE FIRST SHALL BE THE LAST, THE LAST THE FIRST.
But the dear child his vacant prattle heard
In wonder, and believed it lore profound:
And ever after, when in solemn church,
(The very church I have before me now!)
Or household prayer, these words were touched upon,
Pert visions would intrude of gabbling fowls
Mid splashing waters, sedge, and lily stars.

In wending home, he filled her lap with flowers;
And she, ere yet the house was reached, unloosed

His guarding hand, ran forward, glinted through
The porch, and with a joyous outcry lit
The room, where sat in converse or at books
Her parents: then, as she an hour before
Had seen those mirrored marvels of the lake
All trembling merge to one confused turmoil
Of beauty broken into shattered lights,
When o'er its surface swept the hungry fowls,
So blurred with shifting catches, so involved
Through eagerness, her babbled narrative
To the kind mother, who, embracing her,
Felt satisfied her child had been well pleased.
Then the great father, he would lightly lift
To knee his darling girl; with fingers cup
The tiny chin, and kiss the rosebud mouth;
And gently his large tawny hand would stroke
That woven sunshine glowing down her back,
Which changed to deepest auburn glossed with gold,
Calling her tricksy names. But, when at length
Appeared the calm inevitable nurse,

He laughed; and she in screaming laughter flew
By stalwart arm thrust high above his head
Immeshed in wild-flowers emptied from her lap,
Which shaking off, he brought the screamer down,
And gaily swung her into willing arms.
She talked these childhood memories while we strolled
Among the scenes which bred them; for she loved
To dwell on things which some regard as slight:
But in her presence, told by her own self,
With clear apt words and satisfying voice;
The violet poise of her most graceful head
Flung forth in lighted gesture to reveal
The very fact; her hovering white hand
Almost in music warbling with her words,
And bounding all the tenderest care to please;—
Thus choicely given, these aits of memory glow
In hallowed splendour, and have made less dark
A life I feel not altogether vain.

So common was her mother's lot, that who

Can say "Like is not mine" is blessed indeed:
For they are countless that on shades have thrown
Their passion and been chilled for evermore!
Scarce at her bloom, and years before she met
The destined man her husband, girllike she
Adored a youth with sparkling genius graced,
Who bound to great adventure spread all sail;
But needed ballast, working common sense,
And meeting storms, he foundered and was lost.
For long his fate dragged at her heart; it drained
Her strength; it left her vague and desolate:
Her life became as chill uneasy dreams
Wherefrom we cannot break. Yet be it said,
Lowly and truly gentle were her ways;
She was a tender and obedient wife,
And in a sweet and plaintive graciousness
Her every act performed. I trust her mind,
Subdued by constant sadness unavowed,
Grew clear of shadows, and at last to dwell
Upon the future, reaching one straight path

To Justice throned in everlasting light,
Whose light revealed that chastisement is love.

Somewhat through lethargy; and part the sense
Of duty in forgetfulness of grief;
And something pleaded her own kindliness,
That let her take another as her lord;
But mostly made to yield herself and wed
Her husband's own indomitable will:
And having gained, he cherished her, and loved
Her sweet compliance with the strength of life.

He was a man of thews and goodly frame
Made swart in battle. Under Indian suns
His foes had often there been taught to know
That weight of arm, resistless when he closed
Charging upon them with his sword and eye.
But when his father died, he left the East
For England; here to rule his own estate,
And reign among the county gentlemen,

Who duly came with pride to own him chief.
He had the kingly look of born command,
An eagle set of eye and curve of neck;
A cutting insight backed by solid sense;
Vast knowledge, and the facile use of it,
To break obstruction, or direct the force
Of will resolved to compass every end.
Withal a broad and genial natured man
Who ever kindly turned the doubtful scale
Against himself: no tenant ever mourned
The day when his new master came to rule;
Nor were old village gossips heard lament
The good times fled with their departed lord.

Culture went hand in hand with strength in him:
Broad-versed was he in science; rock and soil,
Plant, shell, bird, beast, to complex form of man,
With something of the stars. Historic works
He mostly read; and ofttimes dug for trace
Of steps long past in archæology.

He loved the singers of our native land
Who take our souls up to the worth of life;
And those deep thinkers whose results display
The secret principles that work the world.
He prized our learned Hallam; but declared
Carlyle half mad; "A coil of restive thoughts,
That touch on nothing sound or practical,
Told in outrageous jargon, cumbersome
As any Laplander's costume!" Which I
In ruffled pride would always straight oppose;
"Your 'practical' means shortest cut to wealth:
But far too frequently purse robs the heart;
One growing heavy drains the other dry.
His style, poetical and close, ofttimes
By note of admiration merely, hints
More than crammed Pro Con of your favourite's page."
At this he shouts a scornful roaring laugh,
The table shaking, and the vessels chinked
As fell his weighty arm: with massive gaze
In hurly-burly sort he bantered me:

" Young bubble-dreamer, plotting stanza rhymes,
What can you know of laws: what know of plans
Which bound these varied interests of ours,
Through crossing currents, fixed for certain ends,
To frame this state we call society,
The full outcome of immemorial time?
Know, here on earth wealth must not be despised,
For we are as we are. While men subsist
By interchanging goods and service, gold
Will be the grease that smooths the whole machine.
I grant a few, the greatest, live content
To give forth what has ripened in their minds;
But greed alone brings each result to grow
And spread its uses through the mass. Beside
Where honour, reason, or instinctive life,
Quite fails, there gold will prick the sluggard loon.
It wakes the drowsy lounger of the East,
Who lolls in sunshine idle as a gourd,
To toil like Irish hodmen. Roused, he hears
Coin ringing lively music; falls to work,

And digs, and hews, and grinds: he sees, not far,
Himself, a chief of horsemen richly clad,
Armed with long spears and silver-hilted blades,
Seizing pachalic power by a swift blow.
But labour, having brought him gold, brings fears:
The weight of wealth has made his footfall staid;
He longs for order, settled government,
And stands, a stern upholder, by the law.

"I know you flout this 'gold materialism,'
For what you call the 'gold of evening skies:'
But let me tell you, boy, for you 'tis well
My lands are broad and bankers true, or else
Your maiden, she poor girl, I often think,
Would want a crust to eat and shoes to wear."
Thus he, in what I called his 'copper-gilt,'
For which I paid him tinsel; "She want shoes!
Her feet will press the flowers of paradise,
And, being angel, she will need no food."
"Eugh! Get your tackle, let us catch some trout."

She never stayed a long while from her home;
But lived a quiet life; contentedly
Taking the continent and many things
On trust; feeling our landscapes satisfied
Her love for scenes. When from a visit she
Returned, no lovelier picture ever blessed
My sight, than when she swam into his arms,
And stood in beauty, frail, against his strength
Supporting her, and kissed his lips and cheeks
And brow. He then, as if his daughter yet
Were but a child, would press the upturned head
Between his hands, where peered the innocent face
Rosy with smile and blush, like a sweet flower
Bursting its tawny sheath: whereon he gazed
A father's gaze immeasurably kind;
And long, in tenderness akin to pity,
There held her, who was beautiful and good.
While patching these rich fragments, strange it seems
What little things obtrude on my regard!
I now remember every sculptured group,

And painted scene, and portrait, figured vase,
Each print unique, and gem, we once beheld
On visiting some neighbouring mansion, which
Contained a noble gallery of Art:
The masters, by whose hands the works were wrought,
Long mouldered into dust. Ah, well I know
Why some have burned their symbols in my brain
And rise before me now!

Stone-bound, Narcissus
Drooping melts into himself; and Echo by,
In shrunk despair, hangs envying what he wastes.
Through smotldering morning mists a glorious sun
The mountain-shoulder burns; above, transmutes
The zenith cloudlets into airy gold;
And deep down, seen through pure crystalline blue,
Glimmer the village, lake, and mountain range.
Superb at ease a Lady stands and smiles
Sweet welcome to the world: though centuries
Have lapsed since she approved her painter's work,
Her smile has such sincerity, all feel

They must have known her some time in their lives.
Here bossed on silver vase, a marriage train
Moves round to music: lookers-on cast flowers
Before the timid bending bride: meanwhile,
Stalwart and proud, her bridegroom smiles abroad
As at a dazzling sun: the pipers blow,
The harpers twang, the cymbals clash, youths sing;
Six maidens walk behind to hold her veil,
One pair are sad, the next look vain, and two
Prettily whisper secrets to themselves.
Here from old paper stands, and looks of men
The manliest, and king of English kings,
The lion Cromwell, in his dress of war:
Beneath him coils a monster welling blood,
Whose severed heads stretch round in scattered gleam
Of mitre jewelled, coronet and crown.
Sharp cut on gem, set in a thick gold ring,
The size and roundness of a lady's nail,
Love bleeding on the dart himself doth point;
Who thus had died, had not with tenderest touch

Immortal Psyche held the anguished heart
Fast to her own, and purified the pain,
And fanned him with her wings.

And now, as then,
Along those hushed rich corridors we moved,
Poring each masterpiece we favoured most,
And would no longer stay, but felt some chance
Must serve us for the rest: musing, I pass
From scene to scene of My Dear Lady's life,
And leave my other memories undisturbed.

Beneath this airy sapphire's brooding rest,
Its shadows overcast me with a chill
Like coming storm, that black calamity
Which struck and took our Darling from their charge
And mine. Grief stupefied us all. At once
The childless mother lost her wavering strength,
And lay prostrated; never tasting life
On earth again! Beside her husband sat
And watched her fading; saw the last poor smile

Wane from her features; till the closing eyes
Lit into tearful rapture; when he knew
Love's immortality to her revealed.
With both her own she mutely clasped his hand,
And held it in most gentle pressures fixed:
But when the tender grasp relaxed and fell,
The world closed round him to a stony blank.

And now was stricken down the mighty man;
As the ripe harvest levelled by a storm
At morningtide; which, ere sun warmth anew
Can flatter into strength, a second storm
O'erwhelms and scattereth to waste at even.

When that torpidity which follows pain
Through strangeness passed to natural regard
For daily wants; his vacant home he loathed:
His spacious garden grounds; his lake; his woods;
The breezy air; the overhanging heaven,
He loathed: he loathed them all. When spring aroused

The amorous songsters of the copse and field
To seasonable joy, their music mocked
His sadness with its echoes, babbling tales
Of what had been: and he, in bitterness,
Resolved to quit a place where every turn
Stood like a foe, whose settled leering eye
In silence gloared with hope to mark his fall;
And left our country. Far, in Eastern climes,
His nation serving, there he fought and died:
And never had a nobler man upheld
The worth and majesty of England's name.

Long toil-devoted years have gloomed and shone
Since these events closed up my doors of life.
Partly from choice, and part necessity,
With constancy have I sustained and urged
The work it was my duty to advance.
For, when my vision cleared again, I looked
And saw how mean a thing was man, who used
The produce of his fellows' energies

And gave back nothing.

Then my spirit saw
This Island race two thousand years ago
In simple savagery, controlled by priests
More fell and bloody than the wolves that howled
At midnight round their monstrous altar-stones,
Scenting the sacrificial human blood.
Saw grim, with legions lynx-eyed Cæsar come
To taste of Briton's valour. When appeared
Legions succeeding legions, and the swarms
Marshalled by skilful discipline had fallen
To tributaries of all-conquering Rome.
Saw when Rome's grip, through fierce luxurious guilt,
Could hold no longer; and with tattered plume
Her eagles left her slaves to stem or tide
The hungry Pict incursions as they could.
Next when a burly genial race here raised
The White Horse Standard: men who wrought the soil
Till yellow corn, responsive, sunned the plains.
When lured by booty, ravens from the North

Bent hitherward: stiffly the contest tugged
Long years; till both the wearied champions joined
Their hands, as common home to share the Isle.
With peace the land grew fat; and wholesome bonds
Of nobles to their kings, and serfs to them,
Fell slackened or distorted to misrule;
When Norman William, hard as rocks and fierce
As fire, with charge of mailèd horse and showers
Of steel, won England. Her rough sons he drilled
Grimly: by stern command and strength of sword
He forced obedience where he fixed a law.
For ages long against men's stubborn minds,
With give and take, the bold Plantagenets
Kept up the drill. At length the race, now grown
By constant wrestle into thews of power,
Moved calm with strength beneath the Tudor's sway.
And then a Northern Stuart wore their crown,
Whose son, unmindful he was over men
Truth-lovers, lied to them and lost his head;
For Puritans held no respect for lies.

Next flared Charles Satyr's saturnalia
Of Lely Nymphs, who sang "Gold, give us gold:
We yield our beauties freely, give us gold."
Hapless explosions, folly, frenzied plots;
Till well coerced by Lowland William's craft.
Then plans that led to naught, or worse, enforced
By Marlborough's cannon thundering over-seas.
Then through the Guelphic line; our race now grows
To that great power which is to sway the world.

Down from those human shambles, wolf-belapt,
To when, in pardonably grand excess
Of pity, through our people's will was bought
Free indolence for isles of Western slaves:
And now, when thousands blandly would deny
The proven murderer his rope, the thief
Due chastisement; and when a General
May blunder troops to death, yea, and receive
His Senate's vote of thanks and all made smooth;
And when, as much from universal trust

In other states' goodwill as from the pinch
Of blinking parsimony, we our fleets
Let rot, and regiments shrink to skeletons.—
From those fell rites to such urbanity
The march indeed is long; and kindly freaks
May sometimes clamour Justice from her throne;
Yet gentleness is still a noble gain,
And we will trust such freaks are nobly meant.

To touch the power we hold, what work has been
Of vigorous brawn, and keen contriving brains!
Stout men with mighty battle in their limbs;
Thinkers, whose cunning struck beyond the strength
Of hosts; priests sworn to God, whose daily lives
Preached gospel purity and kindliness;
Wise chroniclers, whose patience garnered facts
For present want and food for coming time;
And dames who made their homes a paradise,
And kept their husbands great;—have greatly given
The light and choicest substance of their lives

For generations mingling each with each,
Wave multitudinously urging wave,
Toward the one great broadening flow of things,
Then passed into the gloom that swallows all.

Could I dwell here in our 'proud Island Home,
Preserved by countless victories; made strong
By kings and kingly councillors; enriched
By artisans, whose skill surpassed all men's;
And by such wondrous songs immortalized
They glorify mankind: and how could I
Here feed on this accumulated wealth,
Like senseless swine on acorns of the wood,
And own no wish to render thanks in kind?
Surely there could be found some waste wild flower
To yield one honey-drop that I might drain
To swell the general hive?

At last resolved
Out to its utmost spray my force should strive,

And bring to fruit its yet unopened buds,
I, craving gracious aid of Heaven, straightway
Began the work which shall be mine till death.
And if 'tis granted that I may disroot
Some evil weeds; or plant a seed, which time
Shall nourish to a tree of pleasant shade,
To wearied limbs a boon, and fair to view;
I then shall know the Hand that struck me down
Has been my guide into the paths of truth.

And She, my lost adored One, where is She
Where has She been throughout these dragging years
Of labour?

She has been my light of life!
The lustrous dawn and radiance of the day
At noon: and She has burned the colours in
To richer depths across the sun at setting:
And my tired lids She closes: then, in dreams,
Descends a shaft of glory barred with stairs

And leads my spirit up where I behold
My dear ones lost. And thus through sleep, not death,
Remote from earthly cares and vexing jars,
I taste the stillness of the life to come.

What time his scythe in misty summer morns
With cheery ring the mower whets: and kine
Move slowly, breathing sweetness, toward the pail
Their milking-maid is jingling, as she calls
"Hi Strawberry and Blossom, hither Cows;"
While slung against the upland with his team
The ploughman dimly like a phantom glides:
What time that noisy spot of life, the lark
Climbs, shrill with ecstasy, the trembling air;
And "Cuckoo, Cuckoo," baffling whence it comes,
Shouts the blithe egotist who cries himself;
And every hedge and coppice sings: What time
The lover, restless, through his waking dream,
Nigh wins the hoped-for great unknown delight,

Which never comes to flower, maybe; elsewhere,
The worshipped Maid, a folded rose o'er-rosed
By rosy dawn, asleep lies breathing smiles:
Then ofttime through the emptied London streets,
When every house is closed and spectral still,
And, save the sparrow chirping from the tower
Where tolls the passing time, all sounds are hushed;
Then walk I pondering on the ways of fate,
And file the past before me in review,
Counting my losses and my treasured gains,
And feel I lost a glory such as man
Can never know but once: but how there sprung
From out the chastening wear of grief, a scope
Of sobered interest bent on vaster ends
Than hitherto were mine; and sympathies
For struggling souls, that each held dear within
A sacred meaning, known or unrevealed:—
And these, in their complexities and far
Relations with the sum of general power
Which is the living world, now are my gain;

And grant my spirit from this widened truth
A glimpse of that high duty claimed of all.

How wildly flares the West about the sun,
Now fallen low! And as one, nameless, sails,
Lost deep in witching reverie, along
A silent river; passing villages
Busy with toil; flowered banks and shadowy coves,
And cattle browsing peaceful in the meads;
Who only wakes to consciousness, when full
A burst of sunshine from the sinking orb
Smiting the flood first strikes his dazzled sight;—
So I am here recalled to where I stand
By yon red sun-light flaming up the spire,
And vane that sparkles in the warm blue heaven,
And that remembered bell tolling the hour.

Now on the broad mysterious ocean leans
The sailor o'er his vessel's side, and feels
The buzzing joys of home; and wondering thinks

If fate will let him end his being there.
Now pleased the housewife down the path descries
Her husband's footsteps hither bent; his meal
Prepared, the children each made tidy; she
With smiling comfort means to soothe her man,
By labour wearied, through the evening hours.
They whirl their live web, humming like a wheel,
These airy insects. Birds have ceased to sing,
But twitter faintly settling to their rest;
And not a rook's caw rends the placid air.
I now must part; but ere I go, will kneel
To kiss this ivy—modest earthly type,
That would with constant verdure grace her name,
As I enshroud her memory with my love!
For She has been the blessing that has nerved
My strength in failing hours of blackest night,
When doubts oppress and fears distract; and when
Gigantic Evil's hoofs are crushing good,
And pity burns in terror; while, appalled,
Blanched justice shrinks aloof; and not a voice,

The smallest, dares uplift itself against
The dripping blood-red horror which pollutes
With death and danger, heaven and earth and sea;
When men's belief grows wild, seeing alone
The dreadful black abominable sin,
Forgetful that the light still shines beyond;
And doubting last the very truth of God,
They hate their fellow creatures and themselves;
Groaning beneath a Despot, who thinks less
Of precious human blood, than shipwrights count
Of water in the dock, so many feet
Will bear so many tons, if it but aid
One little step his brutalizing aims,
Who as an armed thief sacks his people's wealth.
Then shines My Love's star-brightness thro' the gloom;
And comes, as comes a glorious Conqueror
Returning from that Despot's overthrow,
His brow yet flashed and pale with victory:
Whose prowess long withstood the charging shocks
Of hosts that swarmed; who, baffling with his skill

Their cunning combinations, in good time
Closed his own force and wrought them utmost woe;
Smashed the huge liners of the hostile fleet,
Their swiftest frigates sank to watery hell:
Others he scared like fowls; and trailed the rest
In foamed victorious wake, a captured prize,
Where thronged his people stand in proud acclaim
Of "Welcome Welcome Welcome! To our hearts
O Saviour of thy country! to our hearts
O Father of thy people! welcome back!"
And shout in exultation his dear name;
Who moves through storms of music, and beholds
Gay seas of faces tossed with happiness,
And lit through rapture into wondering awe.
And as that grateful multitude forgets
Whatever wrong he may have done, do I
My scathing sorrows, and embrace the good.

And when, in after years, that honoured One
Returns at last unto his native land,

From having wrought his last great victory,
A solemn corpse; in state his people close,
Solemnly to do honour to the dead,
And stand in silence, mid the mournful sway
Of martial music wailing he is gone
Who saved them from the shackles they abhorred;
And in all reverence, with tenderest hands,
And tearful eyes, and hearts that burn and throb,
They lower their consecrated Hero down,
Down sinking slowly to his lasting rest:
Whose glory rises to a settled star
Lighting the land he loved for evermore.
So comes my love to me: its glorious light
Yet hovers sacredly, and guides me on
To grander prospects, and more noble use
Of powers entrusted me. Henceforth my soul
Will never lack a spot whither to flee,
When crowding evils war to shake my faith
In righteousness: for thinking of Her life
Made up of gracious acts and sweet regards,

Compassionately tender; and enshrined
In such a form, that oft to my fond eyes
She seemed divine: and I could scarce withhold
My wonder Heaven could spare Her to a world
So stained as ours. And now, whatever come
Of wrong and bitterness to break my strength;
Whatever darkness fate may plunge me in;
A ray has pierced me from the highest heaven—
I have believed in worth; and do believe.

II

WORK

SWEET is the moisture of the trellis-rose
Dripping in music down through glistening leaves;
And sweeter still its fragrance that we breathe
On throwing wide our lattice to the morn.
Sweet seeing thrushes bright-eyed speckle-bosomed,
Search dew-gray lawns with keen inspective glance;
And rabbits nimbly nibble tender grasses
Or pause when startled at each other's shade.
Joyous when orchard boughs bend low with fruit,
And golden joy the mounded harvest wains

Mid singing hedgerows smoothly gliding by.
'Tis fair to watch hung pale in milky azure
Mist slowly closing into wandering cloud
Driven by the clean and light elastic wind;
And through that lone harmonious sunshine hum
Of unseen life mark how the floating seed
Pass like flown fancies out beyond regard.

But sweeter than all roses, sights of birds,
Richer than fruit, more than whole lands of corn,
Fairer than glories of the brightest day,
Dearer than any old familiar sound
Of childhood hours, than every glittering joy
Thrown from the teeming fountain of the earth,
Is our impulsive answer to the call
Of Duty.

To such as would be something more
Than they who feast to laugh and die, the voice
Of Duty is the signal note of war,

Nerving their spirits to great enterprise,
And knitting every sinew for the charge.
It makes them quit a happy sylvan life
For contest in the grim metropolis,
And in its ever-widening roar stand firm
And fixed amid the thunder, foot to foot
With opposition, smiting for the truth.
To such the rage of battle charms beyond
The heaviest ocean-plunges dashed on cliffs,
The tempest's fury on the grinding woods,
Or elemental crashing in the heavens:
Beyond a lover's gladness when he feels
His maiden's bosom throbbing tremulously,
Beyond a father's when he feels in hand
The rounded warmth of little firstborn's limb,
Or in beholding him grown tall and strong:
And their delight will never wane, but wax
In greatness with the roll of time, and burn
More brightly fed with noble deeds. For souls
Obedient to divine impulse, who urge

Their force in steadfastness until the rocks
Be hewn of their obstruction, till the swamp's
Insatiability be choked and bound
A hardened road for traffic and disport,
Till giant arches stride across the flood,
Till tortured earth release its mysteries
Which straight become slaves pliant unto man,
Till labours at the desk at length result
In law: who pondering on the stars proclaim
Their size and distance and pursue their course;
Who work whatever will give greater power
Or profit man with leisure to observe
The wondrous heavens and loveliness of earth;
Who will instruct him in the truths whereby
He learns to reverence more his fellow man;
Who point his spirit to the worshipping
Imperishable things, from which he comes
To scorn the fluttering vanities of wealth
As poisoned sweets and baubles should they dim
His eyes one instant to that awful light

Wherein he moves; who do and who have done
All that has ever aided man to free
Himself, imperfectly, from grosser self
And made his seeing pure:—such souls sublime
Will never want for blessed joy in work,
Working for Duty which can never die.

Men may seem playthings of ironic fate:
One stoutly shod paces a velvet sward;
And one is forced with naked feet to climb
Sharp slaty ways alive with scorpions,
While wolfish hunger strains to catch his throat;
One drinks his purple draught, smacks lip and laughs,
One shuddering tastes his bitter cup and groans;
But there is hope for all. Though not for all
To sail through sunny ripples to the end
Chatting of shipwrecks as pathetic tales;
All are not born to nurse the dainty pangs
That herald love's completion, and behold

Their darlings flourish in the tempered air
Of comfort till themselves become the springs
Of a yet milder race: all are not born
To touch majestic eminence and shine
Directing spirits in their nations' sight
And radiate unformed posterity:
But through transcendent mercy all are born
To enter on a nobler heritage
Than these, if each but wills to rightly choose
In serving Duty, man's prerogative:
Which is far pleasanter than paths of flowers,
Than warmest clustering of household joys,
And prouder than the proudest shouts of fame
That follow actions not in conscience wrought.

Fair Duty, most unlike the blight of death,
Whose dismal presence levels men to ruin,
Lifts up his nature into rarer life.
Hers is a broad estate open to poor

And rich alike: here rudest peasant may
Move as their equal with baronial lords,
And those who serve be great as those who rule:
Here a smirched artisan who merely bolts
The plates of iron fortress, breathes the pride
Of that trained chieftain who commands its guns;
And one that points or fires a single piece
Claims honour with the mind who planned the war.

Fair Duty, hard and perilous to serve,
Exacts devotion that is absolute
Ere she reveals the full heaven of her smile,
And gnaws with misery the traitor slave
Who having known her countenance and moved
At her behest relapses into sloth,
Or vies to flaunt in pampered vanities,
Or drudges serf to his own base desires:—
Sworn knight, and armed with mail and sword of proof,
But coaxing brutish ignorance with praise,

And with the wasted hearts of honest men
Fattening the monster he went forth to slay.
But they who faithfully revere her law
As primal, and of every want supreme,
Making edged danger discipline their strength,
Transmuting hindrance to accomplished deed,
Fair Duty dowers with her celestial love,
From which the mystic blessing glory grows;
And glory born of Duty is a crown
Of light.

And all thus crowned illume their work
In splendour that no earthly eye may pierce,
And know that every seed they set, and stone
They fix, and truth they reach, unite to found
A well-planned city in a governed land
That rising bases high a Temple built
Firm in its centre to the praise of God.
And each beholds his labours glorified,

Alike the toiler at a desk, the king
Upon his throne, or builder of the bridge:
The desk in lustre shines a kingly throne,
The throne diffuses radiance like a sun,
The bridge spans death—a pathway to the stars.

FEB. 20, 1861.

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